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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE <b>2010</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Whither Al-Anbar Province? Five Scenarios Through 2011</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>RAND Corporation,1776 Main Street,PO Box 2138,Santa Monica,CA,90407-2138</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>28</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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# Whither Al-Anbar Province?

## Five Scenarios Through 2011

James B. Bruce and Jeffrey Martini

Prepared for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



The research described in this paper was prepared for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity. The research was conducted in the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community under Contract W74V8H-06-C-0002.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bruce, James B.

Whither al-Anbar Province? : five scenarios through 2011 / James B. Bruce, Jeffrey Martini.

p. cm.

Report of results of three RAND workshops held in November and December 2008.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8330-4803-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Anbar (Iraq : Province)--Politics and government--21st century--Forecasting--Congresses. 2. Anbar (Iraq : Province)--Social conditions--21st century--Forecasting--Congresses. 3. Anbar (Iraq : Province)--Economic conditions--21st century--Forecasting--Congresses. 4. Social prediction--Iraq--Anbar (Province)--Case studies--Congresses. 5. Social change--Iraq--Anbar (Province)--Congresses. 6. Iraq War, 2003--Influence--Congresses. 7. United States--Armed Forces--Iraq--Congresses. 8. Disengagement (Military science)--Congresses. I. Martini, Jeffrey. II. Title.

DS70.5.A5B78 2010

956.7044'31--dc22

2010004239

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Published 2010 by the RAND Corporation

1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050

4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665

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## Preface

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*What might we expect for the future of Iraq's al-Anbar Province over the course of the next three years as U.S. forces withdraw?* During a series of three full-day workshops, we posed this question to 30 analysts and practitioners, both civilian and military, nearly all of whom brought considerable experience on al-Anbar Province or comparable expertise on Iraq. This paper reports the results of these structured discussions, held in November and December 2008.

This research was sponsored by the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) and conducted within the Intelligence Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

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## Summary

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### The Question

*What does the future hold for Iraq's al-Anbar Province?* This question cannot be reliably addressed by attempting straight-line projections from the recent state of affairs or by extrapolating present trends into the future. These approaches will necessarily fail because the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, including Marines from al-Anbar Province, will create a vacuum in the way security is achieved and power is exercised throughout Iraq.

As U.S. Marines draw down in al-Anbar, significant changes can be expected throughout the province in security, political, economic, and even cultural relationships. Al-Anbar can thus fairly anticipate a period of potential instability as new factors emerge that will affect the exercise of power and other governmental functions. Precisely how province leaders and other actors will sort out these new challenges during and following the departure of the Marines will determine its future. While we cannot know these outcomes in advance, we can bound our understanding of the future by developing plausible scenarios for al-Anbar over the course of the next three years. That is the purpose of this study.

Multiple futures are possible for al-Anbar. On one trajectory, the province could achieve a modicum of political stability, providing effective governance and services and promising a hopeful outlook for Anbaris. On a rather different trajectory, the province could head into a period of deep political chaos, either struggling for its own survival against a Shi'a-run central government or against itself in an internal conflict among Sunnis fighting for their own particular interests. Other, less-extreme possibilities between these polar outcomes are also possible, though not necessarily more likely.

While this study does not address the probabilities and likelihoods of particular outcomes, it does identify five relatively distinct futures, or scenarios, for al-Anbar that provide plausible but alternative trajectories for the province between early 2009 and the end of 2011.

In brief, we characterize the five contrasting scenarios with the following names, each a shorthand expression of a more complex outcome. Each is more fully elaborated in the body of the study below:

- **Sunni Fight for Survival.** In this worst-case scenario, a renewed insurgency pits uniting Sunnis against the Shi'a-dominated central government in Baghdad.
- **Every Clan for Itself.** Also violent, this scenario sees greater fragmentation within al-Anbar, with nascent cohesion breaking down along tribal, clan, and family lines.

- **Iron Fist.** Strong government control exerted from Baghdad keeps a lid on muted violence and holds restive Anbaris in check.
- **Glueless in Baghdad.** A weak central government in Baghdad motivates provincial leaders to take greater charge over local affairs, leading to improved security and delivery of services.
- **Path to Stability.** In this best-case scenario, the Anbari provincial government and the central government work out effective power-sharing, reconciliation, and reconstruction arrangements.

## How This Study Was Conducted

This three-year outlook is the result of an analytical experiment that we undertook as an alternative to formal research and modeling. With the participation of a subcontractor, Pherson Associates, and our government sponsor, the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, the RAND Corporation convened a series of three workshops in November and December 2008. The workshops involved more than 30 analysts who brought considerable substantive expertise to address this issue. Applying cutting-edge analytical tools developed in or for the Intelligence Community, these expert-based workshops produced this five-scenario set of projections.

The scenarios resulted from extensive consideration of the major assumptions that may underlie any future projections and the “testing” of those assumptions in a variety of exercises. The deliberations also focused on “drivers,” or the major factors that will shape the development of one or another scenario.

## Implications

Some drivers (e.g., the perception of central government legitimacy) are less amenable than others to influence by deployed forces (for example, how Marines conduct their actual withdrawal). Identifying these key drivers, we discuss eight in the study. Knowing which among them can be influenced, how, and with what effects, and acting on this information in-theater could help encourage the development of a preferred scenario or discourage the development of others.

It may be hard to tell which scenario(s) will begin to take shape without specific attention to the indications and warnings that would signal their emergence. Thus, we also include a discussion of indications and warnings that can be identified and monitored through focused collection and analysis requirements in Iraq. Because some scenarios represent “wildcards” that could threaten unexpected developments in an uncertain environment, a well-postured intelligence capability can reduce the potential for surprise amid the emerging unknowns that now characterize al-Anbar Province.

Although specific courses of action are not included in this paper and operational and intelligence planning are already well along, this study is intended to support the ongoing process of campaign review.

## Conclusions

- The future of al-Anbar Province is uncertain, and several different trajectories—some good, some bad—are plausible.
- Which of the five hypothesized scenarios (or combinations of them, or even others not identified here) will most accurately describe the province over the next two- to three-year period is highly dependent on how the key drivers work out in the coming one to two years.
- The four most influential of the eight drivers examined in the workshops are (1) whether an effective central government develops in Baghdad; (2) adequacy of the financial flows, especially into the province; (3) how Anbaris self-identify (i.e., as Iraqis first, or more narrowly along ethnic-sectarian, and tribal lines); and (4) the relative effectiveness of the provincial government in al-Anbar.
- The potential of the U.S. Marine Corps to influence some of these drivers will likely be limited, although it will potentially have higher leverage over other key drivers, such as how the United States withdraws from the province, the capacity of the Iraqi security forces (ISF), and the viability of Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI) and other insurgency groups in al-Anbar. The fact that some of the drivers—all are important—are beyond the easy reach of Marine forces highlights the importance of seeking leverage even where it will be hard to do so and maximizing leverage opportunities where they already exist.
- How al-Anbar develops in the face of U.S. withdrawals should provide little surprise: Key indications and warnings will be mostly visible for monitoring and tracking, to the extent that Marine intelligence collection and analysis capabilities are postured for this critical task.
- The principal implications of this analysis are twofold. First, in the ongoing process of campaign review, Marine forces can be fully alert to how alternative al-Anbar trajectories may unfold as U.S. forces begin to draw down—but only by ensuring an appropriately calibrated and tasked intelligence posture. Second, ongoing course-of-action development can focus on potential points of leverage against the drivers that will determine which of the alternate paths the province takes over the course of the next three years.



## Acknowledgments

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This project benefitted substantially from the expertise of Randy Pherson and Alan Schwartz of Pherson Associates who helped design the study and facilitated the discussions using cutting-edge intelligence analysis and forecasting tools (structured analytical tradecraft). RAND counterinsurgency experts Stephen Hosmer, William Rosenau, and Renny McPherson were key contributors to the discussions, as were several external consultants, notably LTG James Dubik U.S. Army (ret.), and Maj. Ben Connable, USMC. Joanna Mahoney, Jessica Hart, and Bryce Loidolt excelled as note takers, and Joanna also performed countless administrative tasks to support the project throughout. Finally, Maj. Ray Gerber at the MCIA not only sponsored the study but contributed his own expertise and insights to the discussions along with those of his best analysts. Among them, David McCormack led a follow-up MCIA analytical effort to track our results. Additionally, this paper is much improved for the critical reviews of an earlier draft that were provided by Maren Leed, Arturo Munoz, and Omar Al-Shahery. Without the contributions of these key participants and reviewers, and the nearly two dozen other intelligence analysts and researchers whose expertise played a vital role in the project workshops, this study would not have been possible.





# Whither Al-Anbar Province? Five Scenarios Through 2011

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## 1. Introduction

As U.S. Marines draw down from al-Anbar Province and the U.S. military withdraws from Iraq, the resulting security vacuum will leave Iraq's future stability to be uncertain at best. Perhaps no area is more uncertain than al-Anbar, or more consequential (possibly excepting the Kurdish north and Baghdad itself)—earlier the most violent and dangerous of all Iraqi provinces, and lately among the most hopeful, at least on the surface.

A snapshot of al-Anbar at the end of 2008 would show a province beset with uncertainties. Once the most violent province—it was the seat of the former Sunni insurgency and the base of operations for Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI)—al-Anbar was transformed in late 2006 and early 2007 with the tribally led Awakening Movement, which changed loyalty to the AQI-driven insurgency into support for the coalition forces. Today members of the Awakening, including variously such organizations as the Sons of Iraq (SOI) and Concerned Local Citizens (CLC), populate the police and security forces and provide a vital contribution to the stability of al-Anbar Province.

In conjunction with effective operations of U.S. military forces, this dramatic shift brought a measure of security and stability to al-Anbar then unmatched elsewhere in Iraq. By the end of 2008, continued stability seemed hopeful, but fragile—and all the more uncertain in the face of imminent U.S. withdrawals. Because U.S. Marines had provided the essential framework and dominating force for stability in al-Anbar, however fragile, withdrawing those forces could be a major destabilizing factor in al-Anbar's future. What will happen in the province as Marines withdraw?

This question—Whither al-Anbar?—was the subject of a three-day series of workshops convened by the RAND Corporation in late November and early December 2008. The central question posed in these workshops was: What is the outlook for stability in al-Anbar Province as U.S. Marines withdraw?

To address this question, RAND, under the sponsorship of the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA), collaborated with Pherson Associates to apply cutting-edge analytical tradecraft (or methodologies) used in the Intelligence Community to attempt forecasts of highly uncertain futures. This study is the product of those workshops.

## 2. Study Approach

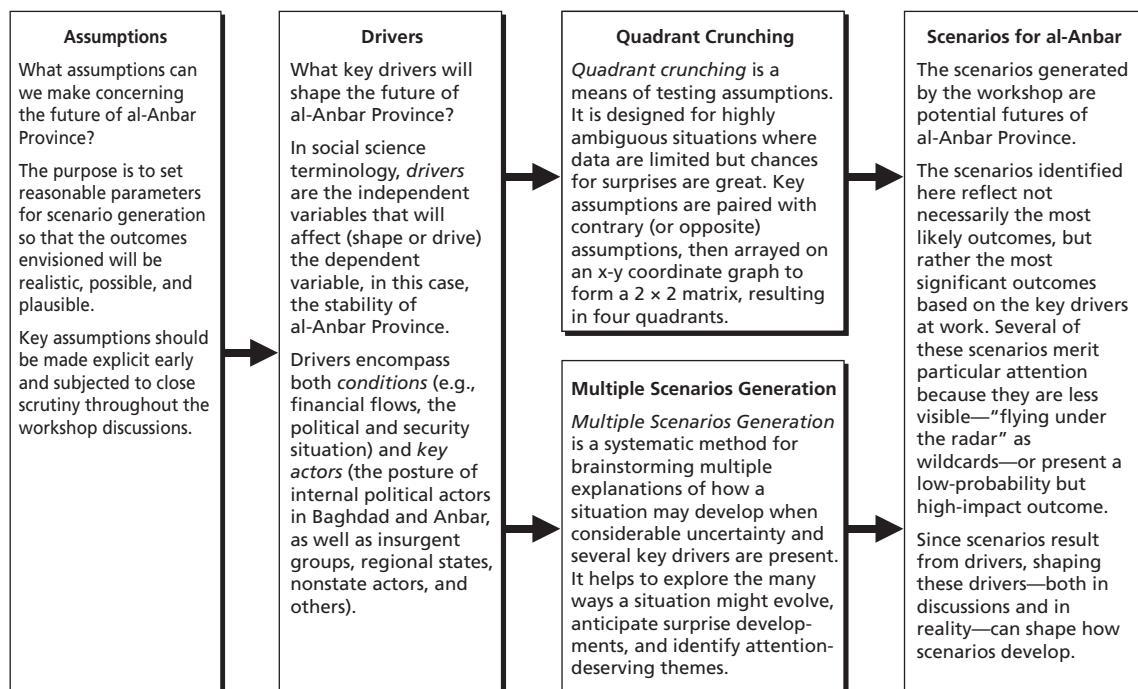
The forecasts—or five alternative scenarios—presented here are the result of these expert-based workshops, whose members applied novel intelligence analytical tradecraft to derive them. Specifically, the four types of tradecraft used are

- key assumptions check
- identification of drivers
- quadrant crunching
- multiple scenario generation.

We describe these methods more fully in Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

This study approach relies more on substantive expertise than on formal research. We assembled experts—in this case, specialists on al-Anbar Province and on Iraq—and structured their discussion to generate plausible scenarios.<sup>2</sup> The structured discussions were designed to challenge group-think, pull analysts out of their comfort zones, stimulate fresh ideas, identify and challenge assumptions, and apply rigor to imagination. The resulting scenarios reflect the

**Figure 1**  
**Study Approach: From Assumptions to Scenarios**



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<sup>1</sup> See also *Handbook of Analytic Tools and Techniques*, Reston, Va.: Pherson Associates, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The workshop participants comprised a mix of Iraq analysts and practitioners representing a wide range of experience from highly seasoned (e.g., a former three-star Army general with command experience in Iraq, and several SES-level civilians) to mid-level and more junior analysts, both uniformed and civilian. More than half had either served in or visited al-Anbar Province, and nearly all have had Iraq as a primary analytical or operational responsibility.

product of a diverse group of intelligence experts who were asked to brainstorm and discipline their best thinking, but were not asked to develop consensus analogous to the production of a national intelligence estimate.<sup>3</sup>

The techniques and scenarios presented here are designed neither to predict specific outcomes nor to define specific courses of action. Instead, they are provided as thought-provoking building blocks to contribute to intelligence collection and analysis and to an ongoing staff course-of-action development process.

We discuss the end product of this study, the five alternative scenarios for al-Anbar Province, in Section 5. Those scenarios are better understood following a short explanation of the factors that shape them; we discuss those assumptions and drivers in Sections 3 and 4.

### 3. Assumptions

In considering the future of al-Anbar Province, workshop members began by identifying the key assumptions that informed their thinking. This exercise served several purposes. The first was to refine a set of realistic circumstances that are used to build “drivers.” Second, participants were forced to explicitly acknowledge assumptions that may have been only implicit in their analysis of al-Anbar’s future course. Third, discussions among workshop participants served to vet weaker or tenuous assumptions that did not hold up to closer scrutiny. And finally, these assumptions set reasonable parameters on the development of scenarios, so that the outcomes envisioned in the scenarios remained within the realm of the possible. The box on page 4 contains seven key assumptions agreed on during the workshops.<sup>4</sup> Note that these assumptions were considered valid as 2009 began but can change over time—and indeed, can be influenced by specific courses of action designed to shape them.

Although many more assumptions were discussed than the smaller subset presented here, these seven were ultimately selected based on the workshop participants’ confidence in their validity and their significance to the future security of al-Anbar Province. The assumptions were first vetted through a discussion process. An informal vote followed, in which the highest vote-getters were selected to inform scenario development. The same process applied to the selection of drivers presented in the following section.

### 4. Drivers

The workshop participants identified eight principal drivers that will shape the next three years in al-Anbar Province. Drivers are defined as *those factors that will have the greatest impact on the*

<sup>3</sup> The first workshop (November 18, 2008) addressed assumptions and drivers. It consisted of more than a dozen analysts from the RAND Corporation, MCIA, Pherson Associates, and several additional experts. The second and third workshops (December 5 and 8, 2008) further vetted the assumptions and drivers and generated the scenarios. These workshops were made up of roughly two dozen analysts from RAND, MCIA, Pherson Associates, the Center for Naval Analyses, and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

<sup>4</sup> These assumptions are roughly rank-ordered here to reflect the levels of confidence held by the participants in them. All but the last two are held with at least moderate confidence by most of the participants. Numbers 6 and 7 require greater examination and may not be fully supportable over time, both requiring greater validation than afforded here.

### Key Assumptions

1. The central government in Baghdad will remain predominantly Shi'a, relatively weak, and wary of Sunni intentions.
2. Tribal identity in al-Anbar will remain the preeminent mode of identification.
3. Future economic growth in al-Anbar and Iraq will depend on levels of violence. Higher levels of violence are assumed to be a drag on economic growth; lower levels of violence are assumed to improve the prospects for growth.
4. Al-Anbar Province will remain a toxic environment for Al Qaeda to operate in openly, although the organization has not given up.
5. U.S. influence in and detailed knowledge of Iraq will steadily diminish.
6. Iraq will remain an intact state with no return to all-out civil war.
7. Recent provincial elections (January 2009) and upcoming national elections (March 2010) will have a greater impact on intrasectarian conflict (particularly Shi'a on Shi'a) than intersectarian conflict (Shi'a on Sunni).

*future trajectory* of the province. They encompass both *conditions* and the postures of *key actors*. These drivers focus on political and security conditions, financial flows, governance capacity, foreign influences or intervention, and the viability of insurgent groups to operate in al-Anbar. We used only those drivers that we felt could have a significant impact on the near- to mid-term future of al-Anbar. The box on the next page shows the eight drivers.

While all these drivers were deemed significant by workshop participants, the degree to which Marine Corps and other U.S. planning can influence them varies considerably (see Figure 2).

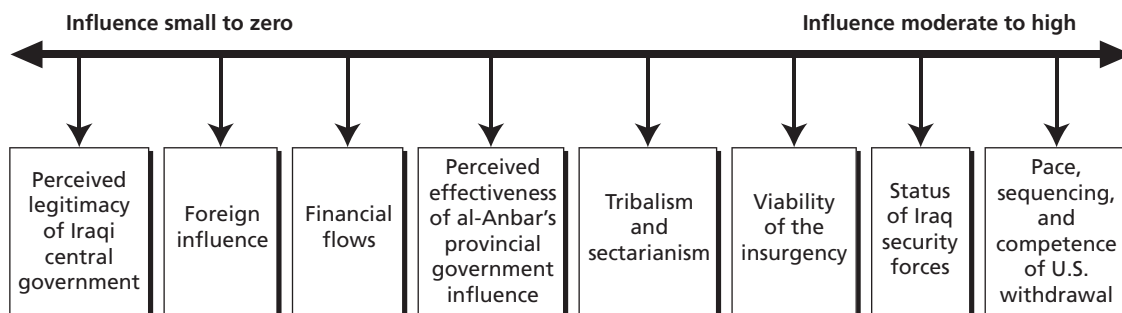
Although Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF) can remain fully informed about the drivers on the left-hand side of the continuum, it will probably have relatively little leverage over how they will evolve and how to best use them to support al-Anbar stability. Specifically, the forces there will have little control over how Iraqis perceive the legitimacy and effectiveness of their government, national and provincial; how regional actors seek to influence events in Iraq; or how much al-Anbar will share in state revenue flows. On the other hand, the MEF will have appreciably more influence over whether tribal and sectarian identities will operate as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor in al-Anbar;<sup>5</sup> how toxic or hospitable al-Anbar will be as an operating environment for AQI and other insurgent groups; and the development of Iraqi security forces (ISF) capabilities. More importantly, Marines can also influence the manner of U.S. withdrawals so as to contribute to the security and stability of Iraq rather than amplifying the effects of a power vacuum left in its wake.

<sup>5</sup> Through a policy of tribal engagement, Multinational Forces (MNF)–West has successfully influenced tribal leaders at the province, tribe, and sub-tribe level to reduce violence and to support various security measures. Although the Awakening Movement is the most notable of these successes, critical, if less publicized, initiatives taken by unit commanders and the MNF–West Engagement Cell have made possible a variety of productive military-tribal relationships.

## Principal Drivers

1. **Perceived legitimacy of the central government.** The ability of the central government in Baghdad as perceived by most Iraqis to competently manage its affairs and respond to the needs of its diverse constituencies—including Anbaris.
2. **Financial flows.** The extent to which money is flowing to Iraq, and in particular al-Anbar, from oil production, foreign investment, foreign assistance, or other economic activity.
3. **Self-identification, tribalism, and sectarianism.** The extent to which Sunnis are accommodated and integrated into key government structures, notably security forces. The flip side of this driver is the destabilizing role that sectarian tensions can play in Iraq along with tribal and other parochial rivalries.
4. **Perceived effectiveness of al-Anbar's provincial government.** The ability of al-Anbar's provincial government as perceived by Anbaris to competently and effectively manage its affairs. This includes reconstruction, the provision of services and basic security, and distribution of patronage.
5. **Viability of the insurgency.** The extent to which AQI and other insurgent groups find al-Anbar a toxic or supportive operational environment.
6. **Status of the Iraqi security forces.** The capability and cohesion of the ISF and the extent to which they are able to absorb SOI and local militias while maintaining loyalty to national institutions.
7. **Pace, sequencing, and competence of U.S. withdrawal.** The extent to which the U.S. government and its military forces can improve conditions on the ground and build the capacity of their Iraqi counterparts before withdrawing.
8. **Foreign influences—helpful or hurtful?** Whether regional (Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey) and extra-regional actors (China, Russia, EU) play constructive or destabilizing roles in Iraq.

**Figure 2**  
**Principal Drivers and Suggested Range of Marine Expeditionary Force's Potential Influence**



The continuum also suggests a prioritization of effort by MEF in those areas over which it may exercise the most leverage. Thus, influencing which of the alternative paths (or trajectories) al-Anbar Province may take over the next two to three years will require U.S. forces there to focus on building the capacity of Iraqi counterparts as U.S. forces draw down, continuing their efforts to deny AQI and other insurgent groups the freedom to operate in the province, sustaining a high level of training of the ISF, ensuring full SOI integration into the Iraqi government, and continuing tribal engagement to empower those groups as stakeholders in the security of the province.

## 5. Scenarios

The key output from the workshops was the generation of five scenarios that map alternative futures for al-Anbar Province. In this exercise, scenario development was shaped by *significance* rather than *probability*. Thus, the scenarios do not necessarily capture what is most likely to occur in the province, but rather what contingencies the participants believe are worthy of the attention of the Marine Corps. Some of these scenarios “fly under the radar” or represent low-probability but high-impact outcomes. Since all are possible, though not equally so, and since their varying plausibilities depend on how the drivers play out, they all merit attention.

The five scenarios presented below are useful on two levels. First, they lay out potential trajectories for al-Anbar Province that our workshop participants deemed plausible outcomes. Since a scenario qualified for inclusion only after the participants had laid out a path through which it could actually come to pass, all of the scenarios have been vetted for plausibility. Second, and most important, the scenarios are built on the key drivers identified previously. Thus, the scenarios provide a window through which to examine how changes in these key drivers could affect the stability of the province.

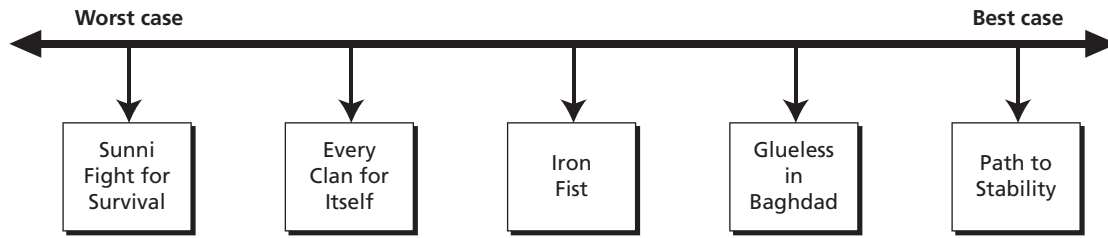
The focus on key drivers can illuminate those that can possibly be leveraged in order to encourage one trajectory over another. Moreover, because the drivers will manifest some of their own unique indicators and warnings, close attention to these indicators and warnings should help better posture intelligence collection and analysis. This, in turn, should help analysts assess whether one scenario is becoming more likely than another and keep the Marine Corps alert to opportunities that may provide leverage to influence developments.

The five scenarios are not mutually exclusive; an outcome could emerge in al-Anbar Province that contains elements or characteristics from more than one scenario. Still, these five were conceived as relatively discrete and can be generally arrayed along a best case/worse case continuum. Each is shown in Figure 3, along with a short discussion of the key drivers that are most influential for each.<sup>6</sup> Of the five scenarios generated, “Sunni Fight for Survival” and “Every Clan for Itself” envision the least stable futures for al-Anbar Province. Because these two are the most problematic, we present them first.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that scenario placement in Figure 3 is meant only to convey *relative* best or worse case, as illustrated by equal spacing along the continuum. The names of the scenarios were chosen by the participants with an eye toward capturing the key characteristic of the scenario and giving analysts a symbolically shorthand way to differentiate among the different outcomes.

**Figure 3**  
**Five Plausible Scenarios for al-Anbar Province**



RAND OP278-3

- **Sunni Fight for Survival.** In this scenario, al-Anbar Province devolves into the central front of a Sunni-led insurgency against the Iraqi central government. The return to sectarian violence is motivated by a perception among Anbaris that the Shi'a-dominated central government is an instrument of sectarian interests and is operating in a punitive manner toward Iraq's Sunni communities. These grievances are exploited by AQI and other groups to reconstitute the insurgency, which may also be supported by external actors (e.g., Al Qaeda, Saudi Arabia, Syria). Here, both Sunni cohesion and Sunni-Shi'a hostility are high. This is the most violent outcome envisioned by the workshops for the province, and the most destabilizing of the five for the future of Iraq.
- **Every Clan for Itself.** In this scenario, neglect by the central government leads Anbaris to fall back on tribal and clan affiliations as the primary means of social identification and organization. Since revenue flows from Baghdad are negligible or nonexistent, tribes and clans fill the vacuum, providing a measure of security and some income through the organization of illicit activities that become the engine of the al-Anbar economy. However, unlike the Sunni Fight for Survival scenario, in which Anbaris are united against persecution at the hands of the Shi'a, groups are competing for turf within al-Anbar, leading to violence among the various clans. This scenario, suggestive of the Somalia or Yemen experiences, illustrates an atomized society facing a complete breakdown in civil order. Social structures are based not on the rule of law but on local raw power, such as criminal or armed groups, and the only bonds that remain are with whomever can be trusted, usually someone in the family or clan.

Since these two scenarios capture similar outcomes—a highly unstable al-Anbar—it is useful to compare the principal drivers that shape this result. In both scenarios, an ineffective central government is a key factor in pushing the province toward instability. A second shared driver is the primary self-identification of Anbaris as something other than Iraqis, in one case as predominately Sunni Arabs and in the other case as members of a tribe or a clan.

A third scenario, “Iron Fist,” identifies a future for the province that is not as unstable as the two preceding scenarios but one in which al-Anbar remains restive, uncertain, vulnerable, and a source of sporadic violence.



- **Iron Fist.** In this scenario, a strongman emerges who is committed to bringing al-Anbar firmly under the control of the state. Sanctioned and extra-legal security forces are used to extend the writ of the state over the province, albeit with mixed results. Thus, while the central regime builds a greater presence in the province and consolidates its control over Anbari institutions, its heavy-handedness provokes a low-grade insurgency against the security forces that operate in support of the state.

The key driver in this scenario, which is characterized by neither a highly stable nor an unstable security situation, is strong governmental control. Compared with the preceding scenarios, in which a weak central government was a key factor leading to instability, strong central and provincial governments are able to keep a lid on violence, although some pockets of local resistance flare up sporadically in response to the state's heavy-handedness.

The final two scenarios chart a trajectory for al-Anbar Province that is relatively stable and secure.

- **Glueless in Baghdad.** In this scenario, a weak central government and strong provincial leadership amount to de facto self-rule for al-Anbar. Baghdad's weaknesses are sharply contrasted by an effective provincial government that successfully maximizes the indigenous expertise of its own technocrats and professionals, along with the aid of Sunni-Arab states. This combination fosters a more workable and functioning province, despite a weak and faltering central government.
- **Path to Stability.** In this best-case scenario, al-Anbar flourishes as political reconciliation takes hold and reconstruction efforts create a basis for economic development in the province. Power sharing among Iraq's various ethnic and sectarian communities encourages the involvement and buy-in of Anbaris into the political process. Moreover, the development of local resources and infrastructure provide Anbaris with a "peace dividend." Government is accepted as legitimate because it governs successfully, providing security and basic services to the Anbari population.

The key drivers common to both "Glueless in Baghdad" and "Path to Stability," each of which captures a successively stable future for the province, are financial flows and effective provincial governance. In both scenarios, the flow of adequate resources to al-Anbar and the economic viability of the province remove a key motivation for insurgency. Notably, the results of a RAND survey of living conditions in al-Anbar Province in 2008 offer support for both of these more stable outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the survey's finding of full employment for Anbari males over the age of 24 points to an economic basis for continued security gains. This development is also supported by other data in the 2008 survey, such as year-to-year growth in incomes and the level of optimism expressed regarding future improvement in al-Anbar's economic situation. Again, financial flows are only one of several key drivers that encourage provincial stability but a potentially important one as the survey data suggest.

Similarly, strong, effective provincial leadership enables al-Anbar to progress politically as well as economically, especially in terms of successfully managing post-war reconstruction and the provision of needed services.

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Crane, Martin C. Libicki, Audra Grant, James Bruce, Omar G. Al-Shahery, Alireza Nadar, and Suzanne E. Perry, *Living Conditions in Anbar Province in June 2008*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TR-715-OSD, 2009.

Two additional drivers, foreign influence and self-identification, can also support these more-stable scenarios.<sup>8</sup> Here, foreign influence can be stabilizing if and as the Gulf Arab states undertake investment in al-Anbar Province; such investment could be motivated both by self-interest—i.e., stabilizing an area that could otherwise lead to spillover violence in their own territories—as well as by solidarity with their Sunni-Arab brethren. Self-identification also plays a prominent role in both scenarios, albeit in different ways. Specifically, in *Glueless in Baghdad*, residents of al-Anbar Province self-identify as Anbaris first, leading to a push for self-sufficiency and hedging against the fragmentation seen in *Every Clan for Itself*. The self-identification driver is also crucial in the *Path to Stability* scenario; however, in this case Anbaris identify as Iraqis first, principally in response to a broader reconciliation process initiated by the central government.

## 6. The Importance of Drivers

Future trajectories do not happen by accident. They are the consequence of many factors, just as all complex events have multiple causation. Still, some drivers are more important than others. We focus here on the four drivers that we believe will be the most consequential in shaping which scenarios will be more likely to emerge as al-Anbar begins to acquire its own post-U.S. identity.

First, a *strong central government is strongly associated with stability in al-Anbar Province*. The relative strength or weakness of the central government is a key factor in all five scenarios. Regardless of how a strong central government manifests itself, whether as an authoritarian regime in the *Iron Fist* scenario, or as a legitimate, democratic government, as in *Path to Stability*, a strong center helps to stabilize al-Anbar. However, the effect of a weak central government on stability is less clear-cut. In two cases, *Sunni Fight for Survival* and *Every Clan for Itself*, a weak central government is negatively associated with stability, creating an environment conducive to insurgency, violence, and criminal activity. However, the outstanding exception to this relationship is the third case, *Glueless in Baghdad*. Here, a weak central government actually creates the impetus and circumstances for Anbaris to build local capacity and provide for the security of the province. But the added requirements needed for the development of this scenario—namely, competent provincial leaders, trust in government, and economic progress—highlight the role of less-probable assumptions.

Second, *financial flows* characterize another key driver with significant impact on the stability of al-Anbar Province. Briefly, when financial flows into the province are strong, as in the scenarios *Path to Stability* and *Glueless in Baghdad*, the province also emerges as more stable and secure. At the other end of the spectrum, when financial flows are weakest, such as in the case of *Sunni Fight for Survival*, al-Anbar tilts toward violence. Thus, financial flows into al-Anbar Province appear to be strongly associated with its stability.

A third driver also exerting a particularly strong effect on the stability of al-Anbar Province is *self-identification*, i.e., whether Anbaris' primary identification is as national Iraqi, sectarian/ethnic, tribal, clan, or something else. In those scenarios where violence and instability prevail, Anbaris self-identify in the narrowest terms—according to tribal and clan affiliations.

<sup>8</sup> In analysis performed subsequent to the workshops, RAND more fully developed the two better-case scenarios (*Path to Stability* and *Glueless in Baghdad*), exploring the impact of the additional drivers discussed here.

Alternatively, in the most stable scenario, Anbaris are integrated into state institutions, and share in state resources in a manner that encourages an Iraqi-first identity. Thus, stability of the province is also highly dependent on the tendency of Anbaris to see themselves as belonging to a larger Iraqi identity, or at a minimum as an Anbar-wide community rather than reverting to the clan or family as the only basis for identification.

The *effectiveness and capacity of the provincial government* is the fourth driver that has a strong effect on the trajectory of al-Anbar. This is particularly apparent in the best-case scenarios, Path to Stability and Glueless in Baghdad, both of which are predicated on the notion of a capable provincial government providing public services and economic opportunities for al-Anbar residents. On the other hand, the absence of a functioning provincial government is a key factor in the deterioration of the security environment, seen prominently in the Every Clan for Itself scenario. Not surprisingly, the effectiveness of al-Anbar's provincial government is a major determinant of stability of the province.

How will we know whether al-Anbar is moving toward one trajectory or away from another? Since each scenario displays at least some identifying attributes that are less prominent or even absent in other scenarios, we are thus able to posit some specific indications and warnings that should signal in which direction the province may be heading.

## 7. Indications and Warnings

The workshops identified a number of indications and warnings that could serve as signposts for identifying future trajectories of al-Anbar Province. Table 1 arranges the more important of these by scenario according to their visibility and ease of tracking. The most visible indications and warnings are highlighted in green, the moderately visible are in yellow, and the least visible are in red. While collection and analysis will need to address all of them, those shown in yellow and red should be given special emphasis because they pose greater intelligence challenges—analysts cannot rely as much on open sources to identify them.

## 8. Conclusions and Implications

The RAND expert workshops produced the following substantive and actionable highlights:

- The future of al-Anbar Province is uncertain, and several different trajectories—some good, some bad—are plausible.
- Which of the five hypothesized scenarios (or combinations of them, or even others not identified here) will most accurately describe the province over the next two- to three-year period is highly dependent on how the key drivers work out in the coming one to two years.
- The four most influential of the eight drivers examined in the workshops are (1) whether an effective central government develops in Baghdad; (2) adequacy of the financial flows, especially into the province; (3) how Anbaris self-identify (i.e., as Iraqis first, or more narrowly along ethnic-sectarian, and tribal lines); and (4) the relative effectiveness of the provincial government in al-Anbar.

**Table 1**  
**Indications and Warnings of the Five Scenarios**

Indications and Warnings	Sunni Fight for Survival	Every Clan for Itself	Iron Fist	Glueless in Baghdad	Path to Stability
Iraqi government is assertive in limiting U.S. operations through the Joint Military Operations Command Center	√		√		
More Basra-style operations designed to consolidate ISF control over Iraq's entire territory	√		√		
2010 national elections consolidate power in hands of a single party or bloc	√		√		
"Soft" ethnic cleansing takes place with the forced displacement of Sunnis from mixed areas	√		√		
Nukhayab is ceded to Karbala and Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad is "Shi'afied"	√		√		
Insurgency has disappeared				√	√
Investment and aid is flowing into al-Anbar				√	√
Sunni integration into national politics continues					√
Expatriate Iraqi elites return					√
ISF enjoy support among local Anbari population					√
Pipelines that run through al-Anbar are repaired and developed					√
Ministry of Interior stops paying police	√	√			
ISF withdraws from al-Anbar	√	√			
Sunnis lose political representation in 2010 national elections	√	√	√		
Public services in al-Anbar (electricity, water, trash and sewage) are non-existent	√	√			
Kurds reduce the amount of oil sent to al-Anbar refinery	√	√			
Iraqi government patronage aligns with narrow sectarian agenda	√		√		
ISF loyalty to individuals and/or sectarian affiliations and not to institutions	√		√		
New tribal councils (Majalis al-Isnad) become vectors of prime minister's influence	√		√		
SOI integration into the ISF goes poorly or Iraqi government seeks to prosecute SOI for past participation in the insurgency	√	√			
Stable tribal relations within al-Anbar				√	√
Provincial elections are smooth in al-Anbar and new provincial leadership is seen as both legitimate and effective				√	√
Al-Anbar's local security forces are effective in rooting out underground criminal networks				√	√
Anbaris self-identify according to kinship ties (clans) rather than broader ties (tribe, sect, nation)		√			
Iraqi government looks inward, unable or uninterested in projecting its influence in al-Anbar		√		√	
Arab Gulf funding for Sunni resistance groups	√				
Growth of AQI underground and return of its influence in al-Anbar	√	√			

- The potential of the U.S. Marine Corps to influence some of these drivers will likely be limited, although it will potentially have higher leverage over other key drivers, such as how the United States withdraws from the province, the capacity of the Iraqi security forces (ISF), and the viability of Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI) and other insurgency groups in al-Anbar. The fact that some of the drivers—all are important—are beyond the easy reach of Marine forces highlights the importance of seeking leverage even where it will be hard to do so and maximizing leverage opportunities where they already exist.
- How al-Anbar develops in the face of U.S. withdrawals should provide little surprise: Key indications and warnings will be mostly visible for monitoring and tracking, to the extent that Marine intelligence collection and analysis capabilities are postured for this critical task.
- The principal implications of this analysis are twofold. First, in the ongoing process of campaign review, Marine forces can be fully alert to how alternative al-Anbar trajectories may unfold as U.S. forces begin to draw down—but only by ensuring an appropriately calibrated and tasked intelligence posture. Second, ongoing course-of-action development can focus on potential points of leverage against the drivers that will determine which of the alternate paths the province takes over the course of the next three years.